

WE CLAIM:

1. A method for facilitating the shipment of a package containing items from a Sender to a Recipient via a shipping mechanism, the method comprising the steps of:
storing package data, including item data, in a database;
retrieving shipment tracking data from the shipping mechanism;
adding the shipment tracking data to the database;
correlating the package data in the database with the shipment tracking data;
and
permitting an authorized user to query the database.
2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
assigning the package to a specific combination of a shipper and shipping method based on the package data.
3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
determining whether the package requires customs clearance and, if so, generating the appropriate customs documentation or data transmission to a customs broker.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the package data includes at least the originating address and the destination address, and the item data includes a description of the items in the package, said method further comprising the step of:
using the package data to calculate shipping charges and generate invoices associated with the shipment.
5. The method of Claim 4, wherein the item data includes the description and value of each item.
6. The method of Claim 4, wherein the step of storing package data comprises transmitting package data via the Internet.

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7. The method of claim 4, wherein said permitting step comprises receiving a query over a computer network and transmitting data from the database over the computer network in response to the query parameters.
8. The method of Claim 7, wherein the computer network comprises the Internet.
9. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
 - adding returned item information to the database if items from the package are returned to the Sender;
 - in the case of international shipments, preparing duty and tax refund claims based on the returned item information and the corresponding item data; and
 - adding duty and tax refund information to the database.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein said permitting step comprises receiving a query over a computer network and transmitting data from the database over the computer network in response to the query parameters.
11. The method of Claim 10, wherein the computer network comprises the Internet.
12. An apparatus for facilitating the shipment of a package containing items from a Sender to a Recipient, comprising:
 - a processor having a database for storing and processing package data, the package data including item data;
 - a Sender's terminal for selectively communicating with said processing system;
 - a first communications link adapted for selectively enabling communication between said processor and said Sender's terminal, for selectively transmitting the package data from said Sender's terminal to said processing system, and for selectively transmitting said package data relating to a selected package to said Sender's terminal responsive to a request;
 - a shipper's terminal;

a second communications link for selectively communicating between said processing system and said shipper's terminal;

a customs facilitator terminal; and

a third communications link for selectively communicating between said processor and said customs facilitator terminal.

13. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein said processing system is adapted to select a shipping assignment for the package based on information comprising package data.

14. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein said processing system is further adapted to generate appropriate shipping documents for the package.

15. The apparatus of Claim 14, wherein said shipping documents comprise package labels.

16. The apparatus of Claim 14, wherein said shipping documents comprise shipping manifests.

17. The apparatus of Claim 14, wherein said shipping documents comprise customs forms.

18. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein at least one of said communication links is the Internet.

19. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein said processing system includes a Web site page selectively accessible via one of said terminals.

20. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein said processing system is adapted to generate duty and tax refund claims based upon receipt of returned item data.

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21. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein said processor is operative to add returned item information to said database if items from a package are returned to the Sender, and to prepare duty and tax refund claims based on the returned item information.

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